

## **Out Of The Darkness** by **honey-and-peaches**

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**Summary:** El has been living in the Darkness for a long time now, and she's finally gotten a glimpse of Mike. Set after season 1.

## Out Of The Darkness

He's lying on his stomach in her fort, his head resting on the top of his hands on the pillow.

He misses her sometimes.

No. Scrap that. All the time.

He misses her all the time.

It's like this constant ache in his chest, this constant reminder that he's here and she's not.

He sometimes wishes that things could go back to how they were when she was here, and then he feels immediately guilty because Will had been in the Upside-Down when she was here. Of course, what he really wishes is that she was here. Just here. But it's a lot easier to think back to when she was last here and wish it was then again.

He sighs and he feels his shaky breath on his hands.

The ache in his chest is so different from what had been in there when El was here. The only way to describe was like a glow. A glow in his chest. Warm and comforting.

He misses her. He misses the glow she gave him and the way she made his heart beat differently than it ever had before. He misses how gentle and soft she could be at times, and how fierce and brave she could be at others. He misses her curiosity and questions. He misses her small smile and dark eyes.

He misses her.

The ache in his chest swells and he lets himself cry. That's the thing about grieving, you become used to crying, it becomes a strange comforter, a physical display of your emotional pain.

His tears dampen the pillow and the last of his tears cling to his eyelashes.

"El," he whispers hoarsely to the empty basement, "where are you?"

He shuts his eyes tight, and wills her to appear. He yells her name in his head, 'EL! EL! EL! EL!', hoping that somehow her powers will allow her to hear him, as long as she's not already...

It's impossible to tell how much time has passed in the Darkness. She has no idea if she's been here for weeks or months. Her only concept of time relies on the length of her hair, something that was always kept short in the lab. It's finally growing, and every time she wakes up from a sleep she runs her fingers through it.

She doesn't have anything to do in the Darkness, so she wanders, for hours, possibly days, and then when she's tired, she stops and lies down on the wet ground and cries herself to sleep. And when she wakes up hours later she repeats the same pointless cycle.

Thankfully, she neither gets hungry or thirsty, though that doesn't stop her for longing for Eggos.

Sometimes she catches glimpses of the decaying Upside-Down, it'll just appear if she concentrates hard enough, but it always disappears quickly in a swirl of smoke. If she's even luckier she catches a glimpse of Mike's World, and twice even Mike — she misses him so much — he had been sitting in the basement the first time, alone, holding El's yellow Benny's Burger top; she had practically screamed in delight, but as she ran towards him, he, and the rest of the basement that she could see, turned to smoke and had soon faded away.

'MIKE!' She'd screamed, though it was impossible to tell if this was out loud or in her head.

She'd fallen down, overcome with sobs, banging her fist on the ground.

The second time he'd been with Will, Dustin, and Lucas, playing a game of their Dungeons and Dragons, she watched from afar — scared that if she approached him, he would disappear again — confused. She'd decided that she could only ever see Mike if the two of them were thinking very hard about each other at the same time.

She was right.

The other three boys engrossed in something that had occurred in the game, were laughing and cheering, and Mike turned away from them, his eyes drawn to El's fort. Neither knew it, but in that very moment, they felt the exact same pain: the throbbing ache of grief in their chest.

Mike looked down at the floor sadly, before turning back to the boys, allowing himself to be absorbed back into that world, so different from the world of his grief for El.

El stood there for a long time, watching as Will left, and then later Dustin and Lucas, before Mike finally left too, and everything swirled to smoke and vanished.

She often wonders how she is in the Darkness, if the Darkness is just a place in her head she went to when she was in the bath. Does that mean she is inside her head? Where is her body really? Or is she dead? Is this what happens when people die? They go to the Darkness in their heads forever?

It's been a long time (or at least it feels like it) since her last sleep, and her legs are tired from walking, when she feels it, a tug on the ache in her chest, and she hears it too — his voice — scarcely a whisper, coming from every direction of the Black Space.

'Mike?' She doesn't remember what it feels like to know the difference between speaking aloud or inside your head.

She spins around, before she spots what appears to be her fort. It's tiny, which means there is a long way to walk, but her heart leaps for joy anyway.

She walks slowly and deliberately, scared the fort will turn to smoke. His voice gets louder the closer she gets, and soon she can make out what he is saying: El!

She can see his silhouette in the fort — he is lying on his stomach, facing away from her — and part of her dares not go any closer, yet another part of her senses that the connection is stronger this time.

She edges closer to him, her mind steady and focused; soon she is so close that she can touch the fort.

So she does.

She reaches out a hand and lightly brushes the blanket. She pulls her hand away almost immediately, shocked at the bizarre feeling, which was both real and not-real at the same time.

The silhouette inside does not respond.

She does it again, watching for a response.

Nothing.

She concludes that while she can touch things, she can't actually affect them, and that because she isn't truly there nobody else can see her actions, as they aren't happening in real life.

Gingerly she lifts the blanket up, her heart thudding, she won't have been this close to Mike since she'd been lying on the table in the classroom all that time ago.

And there he is, lying down, his head resting on his hands on the pillow, where she used to sleep, his eyes tight shut. He is just as pretty as she remembers.

He doesn't respond to the lifting up of the blanket, or when she lies down next to him, their hips and legs touching. And what a relief it is to be able to touch him again, El has to let a breath out when she does. His touch always made her feel so warm and safe and loved, three things she'd never felt before she met him.

She lies there, listening to his breathing, waiting for him to say her name or tell her a fact of some sort, but he doesn't, and if El knew what heart break was that's how she'd describe what she is feeling right now.

She begins to sob. Loud, gut-wrenching, heart breaking sobs. "Mike, Mike, Mike," and she hears the words, knows she's said them out loud for the first time since she's been in the Darkness.

Mike sits up suddenly and his eyes snap open. El rolls instinctively out of the way, as he clambers out of the fort, her sobs softening to silent tears with the surprise of his sudden alertness.

He stands up and scans the room, El stands up beside, now able to see more of the basement — the table where the boys play Dungeons and Dragons, the first couple of steps up to the kitchen, the rest is still black.

"Hello?" Mike calls uncertainly to the seemingly empty basement.

El can't tell if her heart stops in that moment or begins to beat faster than ever before, because he senses her.

He senses her!

"Mike!" She says, tears replaced with excitement.

He turns so he's directly facing her, and their faces are a mere inch or two away from one another.

He stares straight through her, but he begins to squint as if he's looking for the hidden 3D image in one of those optical illusion photos, as if he can see something but is having difficulty making out what it is.

She has never been more aware of her own heart before. The way it is beating against her rib cage, the sound it makes with each beat. She waits, desperately, pleading for him to see her.

But he blinks, steps back, and the moment is gone.

In a panic, she cries out for him, in her mind instead of aloud. 'Wait! Mike!'

He hears her voice in her mind, but it isn't from their past conversations or from what he hopes might one day be a future conversation, it's her, talking to him right now. He knows that, but it... it can't be? Can it?

He takes another step back in shock, the expression on his face wild, and his own heart beating as though desperate to escape.

'Mike,' she says again, softer.

He gulps, and tears spring to his eyes. "Eh... El?" He chokes.

'Yes, Mike,' she murmurs, 'it's me.'

"B-buh... But... how?"

'I don't know,' she replies honestly.

"Your powers?" He asks.

'Yes, I think, '

"So this is real?" He speaks so quickly that he stumbles over his own words. "I'm not going crazy?"

She smiles at that, and even though he can't see her, he knows she's smiling.

'No,' there are tears in her eyes again now, and her bottom lip trembles slightly.

Mike shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath before opening them again. "Where are you, El?"

'Right here,' she tells him.

He looks wildly around him.

'Stop!' She commands once he is facing her.

He looks straight through her. "You're there?"

'Yes, '

"You can see me?"

'Yes,' she repeats.

"Why can't I see you?" He asks, his voice breaking.

'I don't know, '

"Are you... Are you in the Upside-Down?" He sounds terrified the answer might be what he fears.

She instinctively shakes her head quickly, before realising she has to verbally reply. 'No,' she touches her nostril and can feel a substantial amount of blood; her head is beginning to throb dangerously, but she ignores it, rubbing her bloody fingers on Hopper's shirt that she was still wearing over the dress.

He breathes out a large sigh of relief with this, but his relief is short lived. "If you're not in the Upside-Down, or in this world, where are you?"

'I'm in...' she isn't quite sure how to explain it, 'I'm in the same place I go when I'm in the bath.'

"Like when you found Will?"

'Yes! It's all black and wet here,'

"But how do we get you back? Isn't that place in your head?"

'I don't know, Mike,' she says hopelessly.

He gulps, and shuffles his feet from side to side, looking down at them. "I really miss you, El," he says, looking back up.

He looks so sad that it hurts her heart. 'I miss you too, Mike,'

"We'll find a way to get you back, El." He says defiantly, gulping as a tear runs down his cheek. "I promise."

Two tears run down her own cheeks. 'I promise to come back, Mike. I promise!'

The two both take a moment to breathe, allowing a few more tears to slide down their cheeks. El's tears mix with the blood from her nose, and she can taste the strange salty, metallic mix as it slips down past her lips.

'Mike,' El says gently, ignoring the growing pain in her head.



"Yeah, El?"

'Put out your hand,'

He does as instructed, holding his hand so the palm is facing El.

She places her own hand against his, and shutting her eyes, she focuses on the pulse of energy in his hand. She uses her mind to trace the energy back through his arm, shoulder, neck, and finally his mind.

She feels it go from that strange real-not-real feeling to just Real. Mike feels it too, and he lets out an audible gasp, causing El to open her eyes.

"I can feel you!" He exclaims.

'Can you see me?' She asks hopefully.

"No, but I can feel your hand against mine, El! You're really here!" He is grinning from ear to ear.

She carefully slides her fingers between Mike's, and he does the same, until their fingers are wrapped around the others hand.

"El I—" Mike starts to say, but the pain in El's mind becomes too great, and she lets out a scream, before dropping to the black, wet floor; Mike gone and the connection severed.

"EL!" Mike screams. He knows something's gone wrong, the way the feel of her hand had just suddenly vanished. "EL?" He waits for her voice to say something, but it doesn't.

"EL!" He sobs. "El! El, El,"

Karen, who is in the living room reading a book, hears her son's cries. "Mike?" She calls out.

When he doesn't respond, she puts her book down and hurries down to the basement.

She finds standing on the spot, turning madly in circles, tears

streaming down his cheeks as he sobs 'El' over and over.

"Mike," she says — her own heart breaking — opening her arms to gather him up in a hug, but he pushes her away.

"She was here, Mom!" He cries, choked with tears. "She was here and something happened! She's hurt!" He yells. "She's hurt and there's nothing I can do!"

She attempts to hug him again, and he abides, falling into her, clutching her as he sobs uncontrollably.

He had failed yet again. He had let her get hurt. She is all alone and afraid and he has no idea how to help her.

El brings her knees up to her chest and sobs to herself, as she lies on the wet floor, an explicable pain in her head, as if her skull is being split open.

She cries and cries and cries, until eventually she can't anymore. Shivering, she wraps her arms around herself and wishes for the peaceful oblivion of sleep.